



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

Online Version: <https://feedthefuture.gov/article/coffee-farming-offers-hope-rwandan-farmers-troubled-history>

Coffee Farming Offers Hope to Rwandan Farmers with a Troubled History

Since the tragedy of the 1994 genocide, Rwanda has made significant strides toward stability and growth. In the past five years alone, incomes have risen nearly six percent.

But for the 80 percent of the Rwandan labor force employed in agriculture, poverty and hunger are still big challenges: nearly half of Rwandan agricultural households experience food insecurity.

Fortunately, Rwanda's coffee sector is giving hope to many of these families. With Rwandan specialty coffee winning international competitions and ranking among the world's most prized coffees, market demand is growing and smallholder farmers are among those who stand to benefit from the coffee boom.

From 2005-2007, U.S. Government support helped establish the Rwanda Smallholder Specialty Coffee Company and enabled it to improve drying and roasting techniques and strengthen its management, production, marketing, and financial and accounting systems. Today, following additional grant assistance from the [U.S. African Development Foundation](#) (USADF), the company is made up of six coffee cooperatives, supporting over 13,500 smallholder coffee farmers. Here, one of these farmers shares a day in her life in pictures.



Maria Bedabazingwa is a 59-year-old member of the Dukunde Kana coffee farmers' cooperative in Musasa, Rwanda.



Daily, Bedabazingwa collects grass from bushes in the surrounding hills to feed her cows and to make the soil bed for her coffee plants.

Bedabazingwa started coffee farming with her late husband, but their efforts together ended in tragedy: both her husband and two of her eldest children were killed during the country's 1994 genocide, and her family plantation and house were destroyed.



Bedabazingwa drinks fresh milk from her dairy cow, which she acquired through her coffee cooperative's fund.

In 2002, Bedabazingwa began to find hope again when she joined a coffee farmers' association that has since evolved into the Dukunde Kana cooperative with assistance from USAID.



Bedabazingwa removes waste from the cow barn to make manure for her coffee plantation.

Through the support of Dukunde Kana, Bedabazingwa was able to start farming again and, over time, has restored much of the prosperity and aspiration that she lost two decades ago.



Three years ago, Bedabazingwa had a serious medical operation. Luckily, insurance covered most of the cost of her care. It is through the cooperative's fund that Maria has been able to secure her annual health insurance fees.



On a given day, the Rwanda Smallholder Specialty Coffee Company – of which Dukunde Kana is a part – hires over 150 women to sort processed coffee beans by hand, ensuring only the highest quality beans are collected for export and local consumption.



Today, Bedabazingwa owns her own house. Thanks to the income she earns, she was able to pay for 50 percent of the construction costs out of pocket. Through her hard work and the opportunities she has received through her cooperative and its parent company, she has achieved self-sufficiency.

The Rwanda Smallholder Specialty Coffee Company was created through the collective efforts of USADF and a U.S. Agency for International Development project. Through its six coffee cooperatives, the company processes coffee cherries and exports coffee to the United States, Europe and Japan, with plans to expand to South America. The company's coffee has been recognized as one of the six best coffees in the world at the International "Cup of Excellence" Competition.

All photos by Andrew Esiebo, courtesy of USADF.